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ABSTRACT

Twenty-five years ago a small volume of essays entitled "Crisis in the Humanities" was published containing an ominous message: namely, that the humanistic disciplines had arrived at a crossroad--a turning point at which a decisive change for better or worse was imminent. Humanistic scholarship appears to have declined since that crossroad was reached, and the reason may be that as pursued at present in many areas, it produces knowledge that is of little intrinsic interest and relevance. This essay formulates and addresses the question of how the humanities can be revitalized and vindicated. There are no simple solutions to this problem; what is needed is a new working concept on which humanistic scholarship can be based. Of theories put forward recently as conceptual frameworks for humanistic scholarship, none is more helpful than Karl Popper's proposition of a world of encoded or "objective" knowledge. Popper's proposition as it can be applied to humanistic scholarship is discussed with great optimism. Comments on the main essay by two other scholars, Michael T. Ryan and Thomas F. Staley, also are included in this volume. (DB)

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The Future of Humanistic Scholarship

by Bernhard Fabian

with comments by Michael T. Ryan
and Thomas F. Staley

Library of Congress
Washington
1990

Center for the Book
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Foreword

Bernhard Fabian presented his talk on "The Future of Humanistic Scholarship" on June 26, 1989, at a program sponsored by the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress and the American Library Association's Library History Roundtable. The occasion was the annual meeting of the American Library Association, held in Dallas, Texas, and the sponsors were fortunate to be able to present not only Professor Fabian, who teaches at Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität in Münster, Federal Republic of Germany, but also, as commentors, Michael T. Ryan, Director of Library Collections at Stanford University, and Thomas F. Staley, Director of the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin. It is a pleasure to present to a wide audience the reflections of these three scholars.

Bernhard Fabian was born in Silesia and graduated from the University of Marburg, where his doctoral dissertation was on Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* and the views contemporary English writers held about America. He has been Professor of English at the University of Münster since 1962, but his interests in the history of publishing and reading have led him increasingly to the study of the history of books and scholarship and, most recently, to considering the role of the research library in the scholarly process. His major study of German research libraries and scholarship, *Buch, Bibliothek und geisteswissenschaftliche Forschung* was published in Göttingen in 1983 and is being translated for publica-

tion in the United States.

The Center for the Book was established in 1977 to stimulate public interest in books, reading, and libraries, and to encourage the study of books. Its projects, lectures, symposia, exhibitions, and publications are supported primarily by tax-deductible contributions from individuals and corporations. The center is grateful to Mrs. Charles W. Engelhard for a donation that made this publication possible. Thanks go also to the cosponsor of Professor Fabian's presentation, the Library History Roundtable of the American Library Association, and particularly to its 1988-89 chairman, Gordon B. Neavill, for his work in arranging the program.

John Y. Cole
Director
The Center for the Book

Reflections on the Future of Humanistic Scholarship

by Bernhard Fabian

Twenty-five years ago, a small Penguin volume was published with an ominous cover design suggesting downward movement and decline. Edited by the well-known historian J. H. Plumb, it contained a series of essays, written by experts in their fields, on the major humanistic disciplines from history and theology to literature and the fine arts. It was entitled *Crisis in the Humanities.*

As a collective statement, the book was intended to convey a straightforward message: The humanities had reached a crisis in the original sense of the word—a turning point at which a decisive change for better or worse was imminent. They had arrived, in J. H. Plumb's words, "at the cross-roads, at a crisis in their existence: they must either change the image they present, adapt themselves to the needs of a society dominated by science and technology, or retreat into social triviality. This is the crucial problem facing the humanities."[1]

In the euphoric sixties, when the book appeared, such a forecast must have appeared inordinately pessimistic. No unsuspecting observer would have found reasons for this kind of gloomy prophecy. The humanities were well provided for and humanistic research was thriving. The number of scholars working in each field had vastly increased and was larger

than ever. Research was carried out on a great variety of subjects, and the fruits of this research were coming forth in ever growing numbers of articles and books. In short, if liveliness is an indication of vitality, the humanities must have seemed to be in a healthy condition.

Today, a different—but notoriously familiar—picture presents itself. Judging from many symptoms of agitation, nervousness, and despondency, no observer in his senses would pronounce the humanities in a state of good health. It is true that the last two decades or so have been a significant and an eventful period in the long history of the humanities, a period not without successes and triumphs, when judged by the best scholarly work that was done. But these two decades have also been a period of trouble, unrest, disturbance, and evident decline. If in the early sixties the humanities were at the crossroads, they appear to have taken since then a course not for the better but for the worse. The feeling that they are in a plight is widespread, if not universal, and this plight causes, among humanists and non-humanists alike, irritation and concern.

Until recently, the humanities occupied an unchallenged position. This position was based on a long-established intellectual prestige acquired in the Renaissance and consolidated in the nineteenth century by the systematic exposition of a theory and methodology of humanistic studies. No need was felt to substantiate the claims of the humanities to a central place in the intellectual world. This place was taken for granted, and the rights to it, usually expressed in ritualistic formulas, were readily acknowledged. Within a relatively short period of time, the humanities have retreated, or have had to retreat, from this central position. They have moved, or been moved, to a marginal position of lower rank and inferior prestige. The process has been a gradual one; at times it was accompanied by academic upheaval, as in the wake of the events of 1968, but for the most part it has been a descent step by step.

There is no need here to rehearse the current controversies

over the state of the humanities. With slight but interesting variations, the arguments are the same in every country with a sizeable research potential and an established tradition of humanistic scholarship. But I should like to note that among those who view the scene with perception and detachment there is a growing reluctance to attribute the decline of the humanities predominantly to external causes. Few of them deny that the conspicuous withdrawal of public support in recent years has had an adverse effect on humanistic scholarship. But most of them feel that the withdrawal is not the cause of the decline but that the decline must be seen as the cause of the withdrawal.

Increasingly, the weak state of the humanities is being regarded as largely self-inflicted. It is seen as a natural consequence of the fact that over the last two or three decades they have progressively detached themselves from the social context in which they were embedded, and disengaged themselves from the social function on which their recognition rested. It is felt that as a group of interdependent academic disciplines they are no longer committed to transmitting the cultural heritage and to keeping the central elements of this heritage present and alive as an essential service which they must perform for society.

The problem has arisen with the intense professionalization which came into being in the postwar period and, more specifically, with the unprecedented expansion in the history of learning and higher education during the sixties. The motivation behind scholarship changed and a new style of research emerged, intent on displaying professional competence and, not infrequently, sheer professional brilliance. Scholarship became as it were "pure" or, for that matter, autonomous. This is not to say that research ceased to be actuated by subjects and problems generally recognized as worth investigating. But, broadly speaking, it became more and more concerned with what could be done in a given field and with what was professionally expedient at a particular moment in the development of a given discipline.[2]

This professionalism has undoubtedly led to an enormous sophistication of humanistic scholarship. New approaches were opened up, rigorous methodologies established, and coherent theoretical frameworks devised. In many ways the modes and techniques of analysis were improved. But there were also negative effects. With growing refinement, scholarship became highly specialized and frequently esoteric and inaccessible. Theories and methodologies tended to become ends in themselves, and substantive content was often dismissed as extraneous to the scholarly pursuit. All subjects became more and more equal, irrespective of their value or importance. In sum, scholarship tended to lose touch with its own basis and—to quote the physicist and Nobel Prize-winner Erwin Schrödinger, who warned against an isolation of theoretical physics from its "cultural context"—to cut itself off "from the rest of cultural mankind."[3]

The most conspicuous example is furnished by the modern literatures. Scholarship in these fields has advanced beyond expectation. It has become refined to the point of rarefication. It is—a well-known phenomenon—highly fragmented, overspecialized, and overproductive. A vast edifice of analysis and interpretation has been erected and is relentlessly being added to. At the same time, the basis of this edifice crumbles. Literature, for a long time the major medium in which society viewed itself, has lost, or is rapidly losing, its institutional status. It is no longer accepted, in the nineteenth-century sense, as a criticism of life; nor is it, in the sense attached to it by leading twentieth-century critics, any longer regarded as a matter of serious engagement. As a critic recently put it, literature as an institution—still alive in the fifties and, perhaps, the early sixties—has dissolved like a tablet in a glass of water: it has disappeared, though it is still there, identifiable only as a matter of minority interest.[4]

The general point to be made is that, if looked at from the outside, humanistic scholarship as pursued at present in many areas produces knowledge that is of little intrinsic interest and relevance. It also fails to deal with its proper subjects and

problems in such a way that its results can be assimilated into the cultural context of a society in which other kinds of knowledge play an important or even dominant role.

To return to my opening quotation: If to avoid self-trivialization the humanities must change the image they present, how can it be changed? What should be the features of a new image that makes the humanities again acceptable in an age that is far more complicated than the age of science and technology twenty years ago? Beyond that, how can their intellectual reputation be restored?

Any attempt to vindicate the humanities and humanistic scholarship has to take into account that their former status cannot be reclaimed in the traditional manner. There is an established rhetoric for praising the humanities, as there is a new rhetoric for complaining about their condition. It has been overused and is worn out. The great words have a hollow ring and appear to be out of tune today, especially when used in a politically diluted form. "The humanities," it has been caustically observed, "are lying at death's door. Their condition is known by the fact that they are receiving eulogies throughout the land....All fill the air with their pious affirmations of civilization's absolute dependence upon the humanities."[5]

Not much can be made at present of the educational value of the humanities. The classical tradition is no longer alive, and the ideals and beliefs that were transmitted with it have been dismissed or absorbed in other traditions. The humanistic heritage is still being studied but rather in the manner of a postmortem examination. All other claims made for a humanistic or specifically literary education can be contested, and have been, time and again. It cannot now be said without major qualifications that only the study of humanistic subjects would train sensibilities and perceptions, form a capacity for making critical judgments, and stimulate creativity. The

instability, if not disarray, of the traditional educational system will not bear such assertions.

New arguments in support or defense of the humanities are equally dubious. They range from the statistical to the philosophical. Does the mere fact that millions have seen a film based on a classical work of literature testify to a revival of the humanities? Is the present boom of museums conclusive proof of a new mass interest in humanistic subjects? A skeptical answer may not be amiss, even if one does not share the cynical view that the humanities are about to become an annex to the entertainment industry. At the other end of the spectrum, the attempt is made (particularly in Germany) to reinstate the humanities by simply declaring that the more modern the world becomes the more "inevitable" the human sciences will be.[6] The social role here assigned to the humanities is that of a compensating agent making good for the damages caused by modernity. It is difficult to see how this can work, unless one reduces the humanities to a lower branch of moralistic cultural criticism.

The problem of revitalizing the humanities is a complex one. There are no simple solutions, and naive approaches must be avoided. What is needed is not so much a grand theory which deals systematically with every aspect and every implication of the study of man, society, and history. What is needed, as I see it, is a new working concept on which humanistic scholarship can be based. It should be comprehensive, so that it can accommodate a number of disciplines and a variety of traditions. It should be specific, so that it brings out the distinctive features of the subjects with which the humanistic scholar is concerned and of the procedures he follows in his work. Above all, it should give new credibility to the humanities.

Of the theories put forward more recently as conceptual frameworks for humanistic scholarship, in my view none is

more helpful than Karl Popper's proposition of a world of encoded or "objective" knowledge. It did not originate as a theory of the humanities but as a theory about the ontological and epistemological status of scientific systems, problems, and arguments. Popper extended it to include all linguistic expressions and all records of human intellectual activity, so that in its final form it covers the whole range of man's cultural efforts.[7]

The world of objective knowledge, it will be remembered, is part of a three-world philosophy developed by Popper. He distinguishes "first, the world of physical objects or of physical states; secondly, the world of states of consciousness, or of mental states, or perhaps of behavioural dispositions to act; and thirdly, the world of *objective contents of thought*, especially of scientific and poetic thoughts and works of art." Whatever exists in the realms of matter and mind can be assigned to one of these three "worlds"—a term which Popper uses pragmatically, without taking the word itself "too seriously."[8]

The novelty and the boldness of Popper's approach do not lie in the tripartite division of worlds or in the conception of a "real" world of physical objects and a subjective world of the states of consciousness. Much of this is conventional philosophy. The novelty lies in the fact that he attributes to World 3—the "world of objective contents of thought"—an ontological status not generally ascribed to it. Popper confers on it an "independent existence" and regards it as "largely autonomous." In other words: all linguistic and artistic creations are seen by Popper no longer as merely subjective experiences but as objects existing in a "real" world. In the same way, theoretical systems and critical arguments have an existence of their own. Essentially, World 3 is an immense reservoir and repository.

World 1 and World 3, the realm of natural and cultural phenomena, are distinct spheres and will remain separated from each other. But there is a continuous interaction between the world of subjective experience and the other two worlds.

World 2 can act immediately on World 1 as it can on World 3. World 2 can also act on the other Worlds by making use of "stored" or "objective" knowledge. More important, World 2 is modified and "grows" through its interaction with the other Worlds. In fact, we become selves through the incorporation of pre-existing "objective" knowledge into the world of our subjective experience. And by objectifying our own experience we contribute to the continuous growth of World 3. (Popper even ascribes to World 3 the capacity of self-growth, but this difficult epistemological problem can be neglected here.)

If this is, in bare outlines, Popper's three-world philosophy, what can be gained from it for humanistic scholarship? Much, I think. To begin with, it allows us to conceive of an independent and self-contained cultural world. This cultural world is entirely a man-made world and can be regarded as a real, substantial, even tangible world. It is a world which surrounds us and to which we have—consciously or not—constant recourse. It may even be thought of, with all the connotations which this word has assumed, as an environment in which we move. The cultural world has its counterpart in the natural world and it exists vis-à-vis this natural world. The two can be seen as opposed to each other but also as complementing each other. The one is the province of the scientist, the other the province of the humanist. Thus, many of the old oppositions between the sciences and the humanities become meaningless, and the humanities need no longer, for want of a solid subject, resign themselves to being the poor relatives of the natural sciences.

The cultural world is an extensive world, spreading over long periods of time, and also a complex world, encompassing a vast accumulation of objects—from primitive works of art to recent theological or scientific speculations, from epic poems to experimental films, from early coins to modern music composed in the computer. Therefore, no narrow definition of the humanities along traditional lines will suffice. Neither the Anglo-American concept of the humanities nor the German concept of *Geisteswissenschaften* is broad enough to include

the whole spectrum of disciplines whose task it is to explore the cultural world in all its parts and regions. Even the French concept of *sciences humaines*, broader than any other, may have to be extended.

I am not suggesting that the boundaries of the humanities should be stretched indiscriminately. But I feel that there is enough reason for viewing—and presenting—the humanities as a large interrelated group of cultural sciences. Naturally, there are core disciplines, but the customary hierarchical order can no longer be maintained without major qualifications. To place the humanities in a broad context might strengthen them. It is likely to open up new horizons and almost certain to expose the intellectual provincialism of some esoteric quarters in the academy.

The concept of the cultural world as a world of storage for present and future use underlines more strongly than most other concepts of culture the dual character of the cultural object. What Popper calls objective knowledge is practically an infinite variety of symbolic values encoded in material structures. If the cultural world is the domain of the humanist, the custody of all cultural objects must be regarded as the basic responsibility of humanistic scholarship. It is at once a social duty and a professional obligation, and it must be understood to extend not only to the symbolic value of the cultural object but also to the material substratum carrying this value.

In some disciplines, the material side of the cultural object is accepted as a matter of course. Archaeology provides the most obvious example. In other fields, the material side is either slighted or ignored. Many individual scholars display a conspicuous lack of interest in the cultural object qua material object, and the humanities as a group of disciplines cannot be said to have yet accepted their proper function in maintaining the material basis of the cultural tradition. The task reaches beyond their traditional boundaries, but it may well prove one of the most rewarding tasks they can set themselves for the future.

On its material side, the cultural object belongs to

Popper's World 1 of physical objects and physical states. It is, for instance, a book printed on paper, a painting done on canvas, a tool manufactured of metal. The maintenance of the material basis of culture poses a large number of technological problems to which individual solutions must be sought. Much has been achieved in the past, particularly in more recent years, but more remains to be done, if we want to keep our tradition intact and want to pass it on to future generations.

The problems which lie ahead of us are many—from the deacidification of paper to the reconstruction of historic gardens. It will hardly be possible to solve them, unless the humanistic scholar is prepared in a way he has not been before to cross the borderlines between World 3 and World 1. I am not suggesting that every humanistic scholar should become an accomplished technician himself. But he ought to acquire enough know-how and expertise to be able to identify competently the problems in preserving the material basis of culture and to make a convincing case for the need to solve them.

Not only does the custody of culture have a technological side, but over the past two decades or so we have come to realize—painfully in many instances—that it has an economic side as well and, whether we like it or not, a political side. What has come to be called Enterprise Culture may not be an entirely new phenomenon in the United States.[9] It has certainly not been a familiar way of cultural care in Europe. There are signs that on both sides of the Atlantic the future will lie with a system of support for culture and cultural activities (and this would include the humanities) in which state responsibility and private initiative are combined in one way or another. This system will require, on various levels, expert custody and responsible custodianship, which is more than skilled management or smart entrepreneurship. What we need is a new type of humanist who will perform imaginatively the difficult task of preserving the cultural tradition in a world which is politically, economically, and technologically indifferent or even hostile to culture.

The cultural tradition, though omnipresent as an envi-

ronment, is densely concentrated in the so-called cultural institutions. Of these, the two most conspicuous are the museum and the library. Their specific function is to assemble cultural artifacts with a view to protecting them and to making them accessible to those seriously interested in them. Museums are in vogue today as never before in their history. The new social role which they have assumed is still largely unexplained. Their popularity and its implications is one of the most baffling features of the contemporary cultural scene. Libraries do not stand in the same high favor with the public. Support for them is diminishing at the same time that pressures are increasing and new services are expected. They are overburdened and underrated.

The situation of the library reveals the basic insecurity and vulnerability of the cultural institution. It is not easy to demonstrate the indispensability of the library, and it is equally difficult to find incontrovertible arguments for defending it. If I am not mistaken, the frailty of the cultural institution derives to a large extent from "soft" concepts of culture. World 3 is a "hard" concept, perhaps the hardest one can think of. It grants the book a new ontological status, and it makes the library the central institution for preserving and maintaining the world of objective knowledge. In Popper's thought experiments to demonstrate the independent existence of World 3, the library plays the crucial role.[10] Should it not be possible to reexamine the cultural context of the library in an attempt to find stronger arguments in support of it? Is the library merely a "service institution?" Is it merely a tool or instrument to explore the cultural tradition? Is it not part of the tradition itself? Is the great library not itself a cultural artifact of the highest order, comparable to a work of art?

There is a special need to convey to non-humanists and to the public at large an adequate idea of the aims and methods of humanistic scholarship. The misconceptions about the nature of scholarship and its institutional requirements are numerous and tend to discredit even work of distinction. Research in the humanities, it is true, cannot easily be des-

cribed in a general way, and it is all the more difficult when the term *culture* is reserved for habits and attitudes primarily related to leisure.

The notion of a cultural world, however defined, suggests a profusion of objects and phenomena. It does not explain their nature; it does not indicate their origin; and it does not establish any relations between them. It merely implies that—somehow and somewhere—they are there. Popper is specific on one point only: all "inmates" of his World 3 have an "autonomous," that is to say, an "independent" existence. Beyond that, his theory is remarkably laconic. It does not confer on World 3 a self-organizing pattern, nor does it provide any guidelines for arranging the contents of the cultural world. *"The understanding of objects belonging to the third world,"* he simply states, "constitutes the central problem of the humanities."[11]

If the mode of existence of World 3 objects is accepted, scholarly procedures in the humanities can be described in simple but trenchant terms which I think make sense both to humanists and non-humanists. Fundamentally, the task of humanistic scholarship is to convert a shapeless, even chaotic world into the equivalent of a cosmos; or, if another metaphor is preferred, to transform a wilderness into a habitable environment. The basic responsibility of humanistic scholarship, then, is to order the cultural tradition, and this operation defines both the social role and the intellectual commitment of the humanities.

"Ordering" is an activity of many facets. On the elementary level, it implies sorting, arranging, and categorizing. It is the level represented by the inventories of the cultural tradition: the catalog, the index, the register, the bibliography. Work on this level is always taken for granted; it is seldom appreciated and sometimes even despised. But in humanistic scholarship this basic ordering process is fundamental research, since its results are later "applied" in other kinds of work.

If the humanities are to change their public image, they

must find ways of bringing out the significance of this kind of elementary ordering. On it depends the use, even the remote use, that can ultimately be made of the cultural tradition. Against the background of Popper's World 3 philosophy the need for "order" in the realm of culture can be drastically demonstrated. But the success of this demonstration will depend on our ability to prove that our ordering activities—from dating single manuscripts to setting up bibliographical networks—are not acts of mindless antiquarianism but thoughtful and sophisticated efforts at recovering and preserving the heritage, so that it can be assimilated.

I wonder whether the various methods and approaches employed by humanistic scholars should not altogether, in accordance with established philosophical traditions, be characterized as a hierarchically arranged set of procedures of ordering. All efforts to "understand" the cultural world around us (whether in hermeneutical terms or not) are inevitably operations in which elements of the tradition are brought into a meaningful configuration. More often than not, really important scholarship in the humanities does not consist in the discovery of something entirely new but in presenting what is already there in a pattern of higher significance, so that the "map of knowledge" is substantially changed.[12]

As a descriptive concept "ordering" appears to be comprehensive enough to embrace procedures which are often seen in opposition to each other or as mutually exclusive. It will cover, for instance, the conventional inductive theory of research, according to which hypotheses grow out of a methodical collection of data. It will also cover Popper's searchlight theory, according to which hypotheses are empirically verified in a process of trial and error.[13] It will be serviceable for hermeneutical and non-hermeneutical ways of dealing with historical phenomena. It will, in addition, help us to see and to explain why research is an ongoing concern because there cannot be a single definitive pattern for arranging the innumerable elements of the cultural tradition. It may, finally, help us to distinguish more clearly between a mere re-shuffling

of these elements and an essential and meaningful reorganization of them.

I should like to go one step further. What we require for a revitalization of the humanities is not only a new concept of the cultural tradition but also a new way of thinking about the function of the cultural tradition in social contexts. It will not suffice for the humanistic scholar to investigate the cultural world with a new awareness of its specificity. This investigation is, of course, an end in itself, and it will again and again have to be defended as a disinterested pursuit. But work on and in a cultural tradition is more than that. It is also a means to an end and must be understood as an effort to make the cultural tradition "effective" as something which sustains society and gives it cohesion and coherence.

It is in this context that the cultural tradition poses itself as a problem. What is its nature? What is its role in society? How does it work in the social process? Or even: what should its role be? If the humanistic scholar does not ask these questions himself, they are likely to be forced on him. However theoretical they may appear, there is a definite political interest in them in a world of multiculturalism, resurging regional cultures, and violent cultural conflicts. And in spite of the currently low reputation of the humanities, the expectation appears to be growing in many quarters that the answers at least to some of the more urgent questions will have to come from the humanities.

The "modern" or "postmodern" social and intellectual environment in which the answers must be sought is not conducive to the study of tradition, though it may invite contemplation about the fate of particular traditions. The old antithesis between modern and tradition-bound is still alive, though it has meanwhile lost its edge and even turned out to be a fallacy.[14] But we live in a society that is dominated not by the past but by the future, even if the expectations of the future are

not optimistic. The tradition of the emancipation from tradition is deeply rooted in this society, which often expressly disdains to be guided by what is or seems to be a tradition. Nevertheless, humanistic scholarship will have to deal constructively with this situation. That is to say it will have to find, within its own sphere of competence, ways of conceptualizing traditionality which stress the presence and function of a tradition rather than its historical origin and the process of its transmission.

To the humanist "the historical" is an obvious and axiomatic category. Other approaches such as those that try to identify structures are often regarded as outside the humanist's province, as in many cases they are. It must, however, be remembered that the rise of history to ascendancy occurred only in the nineteenth century, "the century of history" (Benedetto Croce). It was only then that history assumed the role of a "pilot discipline" *(Leitwissenschaft)* for all humanistic disciplines.[15] Accordingly, Wilhelm Dilthey defined as the province of humanistic study not the cultural world but the "historical-social reality."[16]

History lost this pilot function toward the end of the nineteenth century, and for some time sociology was regarded as a new *Leitwissenschaft*. More recently, ethnology or anthropology has come to be recognized as a helpful discipline, if not directly as a pilot discipline. Its empirical studies have revealed much about the role of traditions in societies and, being undertaken mostly in primitive societies, they have provided simple but illuminating models. Such models make evident both the interdependence of substantive traditions and their coherence as constituent elements of a particular culture.

I do not wish to make a plea for what is fashionably called a shift of paradigms, but I do wonder whether humanistic scholarship would not profit from a slight anthropological turn. This would bring into view various kinds of phenomena not normally noted in humanistic studies. It would draw attention to combinations and interconnections habitually outside the humanist's field of vision. And it might suggest

new systems concepts in dealing with the relations between the individual, society, and the cultural tradition. This is not to say, however, that such concepts or theoretical frameworks should simply be taken over from anthropology or, for that matter, from sociology as the "anthropology" of complex societies. For the humanist, the intellectual apparatus of these disciplines will in many cases prove too skeletal to be useful for his purposes or to be applicable to his subject matter. But it can very well serve as a stimulus for the development of notions and concepts suited to his needs.

What we require, in my view, is a modern equivalent to—not a reproduction or recapitulation of—the "philosophical" anthropology of the eighteenth century as taught by Immanuel Kant and others.[17] It would have to be less speculative than its predecessor, and more firmly based on empirical evidence and psychological insights. But it would have to perform the same service: to relate the cultural environment to "human nature" and provide a coherent survey of these relations.

Three areas in particular will have to be investigated: fictionality, visual representation, and history. If man is, as Umberto Eco says, by nature a fabling animal *(animal fabulator)*,[18] then the discipline which takes care of the products of this fabling should explain to us what the nature of fiction is and how it relates to the nature of man. What are the world-creating powers of imagination, and how do the possible worlds in literature relate to other possible worlds—in philosophy or science?[19] Questions which need a competent answer and also a persuasive and widely acceptable answer.

The visual arts and the experience of them need attention since visual representation has become a much wider field for us than it was even a few decades ago. Whether "literary" and "visual" culture are still complementary or about to become mutually exclusive is a question which extends beyond television and the so-called popular culture. There are new forms in the experience of art which must be accounted for in terms of a humanistic anthropology. And the boom of museums which

has established the "direct" contact with art as a new social fact raises the question of whether history has temporarily or permanently become an unneccessary mode of cultural experience.

Though the presence of the past is obvious, history is certainly the most difficult problem to deal with. The old social uses of the past have largely been destroyed through the rise of history,[20] and history as the intellectual mode of reconstituting the past is now being deconstructed.[21] There is no longer a direct access to the past, except as an object of curiosity, so that an "anthropological" argument to be convincing will need to be carefully reasoned. That "lessons" for the present or the future cannot naively be drawn from history was a point already made by Gustav Droysen.[22] But the question, why history? still needs an answer, and this answer can hardly be confined to the assertion that history establishes our personal and social identity. Does it not also emancipate us from the accidental circumstances of a chronological provincialism?

An "anthropological" approach should also enable humanistic scholarship to play its proper role in the restructuring of our educational system, which is an urgent social task before us. The need for a far-reaching reform of the system is recognized in nearly all Western countries. What is required in the present situation goes beyond the modification of curricula. It is a rethinking of the educational process. We must map out—in forms varying from country to country—a new educational framework in which the need to safeguard the autonomy of the individual is balanced against the need to inculcate the norms, skills, and knowledge which enable this individual to live in a highly complex society and at the same time ensure for this society an indispensable degree of integration.

The problem is increasingly being looked upon as one in which larger issues are involved. In the last two decades we have witnessed a cultural revolution. This revolution has revealed the vulnerability of traditions. It has left behind a

general feeling of insecurity, and impressed upon us the need to ascertain, in a climate of instability, the stabilizing effect of traditions. What lies ahead of us is a tortuous process of reexamination—not only of the substantive contents of particular traditions but also, on a more fundamental level, of the essence and function of traditions in general.[23]

This reexamination will have to be undertaken sensibly and responsibly, and extreme views will not be helpful. Transmitting a cultural heritage is in the first place a matter of establishing canons, of selecting the important and relevant elements from a tradition with many and divers strands. Canon-formation is therefore on the permanent agenda of the humanities. But however much canons have been debated recently, we know little or not enough about the components that go into the formation of a canon.[24] And the purely ideological basis of many canons established in the past decade or so should make it clear that the systematic study of canon-formation will have to be supplemented by a historical study. The subject is in the very center of humanistic concerns.

There is a new tendency to dissolve canons or to dismiss them altogether. To "deconstruct" canons may be an interesting or even a necessary intellectual experiment. But the social and political credibility of the humanities in the future will depend on the solution they find (or do not find, or disdain to find) for the problem of a "common" culture, and on the case they will be able to make for it (or fail to make for it)—not in the academy but in public, in the world that supports the humanities by providing academic institutions.

I wonder whether it will not be advisable to give up the concept of education and replace it by a concept that has long been in use in anthropology: enculturation. It brings out clearly what is required for the future: to integrate the individual into a complex society on as high a level as possible to enable this individual to react creatively to the cultural environment in which he finds himself. What enculturation is in a multicultural, multiracial, and multinational society will have to be defined by humanists in an effort which transcends

the boundaries of disciplines. There are first attempts in this direction, but they are hardly more convincing than the criticism they have provoked.[25]

"Humanistic scholarship," it has been said, "is a tradition of searching for the extension of a tradition of understanding: the objects of the understanding sought are traditions to be understood."[26] It will therefore be in accord with tradition, if we try to extend the existing traditions of humanistic scholarship as they may not have been extended before.

Let me end on a political note. I do not intend to recommend political action. But I would like to draw attention to the fact that significant political action has been taken in an area which directly involves the humanities and humanistic scholarship.

In December 1978 Spain adopted a new constitution. Article 46 stipulates that the state guarantees the preservation of the historical, cultural, and artistic heritage of the people of Spain and promotes the enrichment of this heritage.[27] This is, to my knowledge, the first time that the cultural heritage of a nation is explicitly recognized by a constitution. (The constitution adopted by Portugal in 1976 and revised in 1982 does this in a more reticent form.) There have of course been laws protecting cultural property, and many of the socialist countries recognize in legal form their cultural heritage. But never before has the cultural tradition been endorsed by the fundamental and supreme law of a country.

On the one hand, this constitutional clause marks a terminal point. Since the nineteenth century the modern state has been increasingly involved in cultural matters, and this involvement here reaches a climax. On the other, it marks a starting point. It provides an entirely new basis for the interaction between the state and humanistic scholarship. It opens up possibilities for cooperation, but also for conflict and disagreement. The state can make claims on humanistic scholar-

ship—and vice versa. In any case, the cultural heritage and cultural policy have come to occupy a more central position than they have hitherto had, whether in Spain or elsewhere. Will humanistic scholarship meet the challenge?

NOTES

The notes are kept to a minimum. No attempt has been made to document, by further references, the current debate on the nature and function of the humanities.

I am indebted to the Volkswagen Foundation for enabling me to collect and to consult material which otherwise would not have been available to me.

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25. The most prominent is no doubt E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987). The book has been examined in detail in a series of articles in *Profession* 1988.
26. Shils, *Tradition*, p. 126.
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Comments

Libraries and Humanistic Scholarship

I must confess that after having accepted the invitation to comment on Dr. Fabian's paper (which I had not seen), I had second thoughts. As someone who works in an institution which is regularly thrashed in the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and sundry otherwise respectable organs for having sold out Western culture or the humanities in general, and whose curriculum was recently the object of some pointed remarks by the former secretary of education, I was apprehensive of having to jump back in a swamp I would just as soon avoid. Happily, however, the *Times* is now preoccupied with weightier affairs of state; William Bennett is employed as our "Drug Czar"; and Dr. Fabian has given us a broad, sympathetic, and forward-looking view of the humanities and their future in a postmodern moment.

I am relieved. Indeed, the great strength of Dr. Fabian's approach is that it breaks decisively with that of neoconservatives such as Bennett and Alan Bloom and other "open-minded" citizens who seem to want to appropriate the crisis of the humanities as their self-appointed area of expertise. But they are part of the problem, not the solution. As Dr. Fabian reminds us, the old pieties and old arguments simply won't work: they are dead. A new and more pluralistic agenda is needed to replace the older, more restricted and parochial one.

The problem Dr. Fabian has chosen to tackle is formidable, with implications at once moral, intellectual, economic, and ultimately political. Moreover, in a moment of extraordi-

nary sensitivity to cultural richness and diversity, it is a problem that spans both oceans—not just the Atlantic. In an age of multinational, corporate capitalism, any notion of the humanities that is not equally and literally global will never be competitive. As imposing as the topic is, therefore, let me focus for a moment on some of the implications of Dr. Fabian's remarks for libraries, since that is why we are here.

Dr. Fabian's call for a more anthropologically based notion of culture and tradition, one that would underscore the organic relationship between past, present, and future, includes a rather generous role for libraries and librarians. If our starting point is the multiple ways in which culture is literally objectified, then libraries and museums must be at the center of any program that forecasts a brighter, surer future for humanities scholarship—at least this is what I hear Dr. Fabian saying. If culture is more than discourse; if, as Fabian argues, it is fundamentally the material artifacts that embody it; then libraries and librarians have a major role in trying to reposition and recast the place of the humanities in society. Indeed, I would assert that the success or failure of Dr. Fabian's project—which must be *our* project—rests on the extent to which libraries are themselves better positioned in society. And as Dr. Fabian acknowledges, this will not be easy; in fact it will be very hard. "It is hard to argue for the indispensibility of libraries": indeed!

Why should this be so? One can imagine any number of answers. At the top of the list must surely be the general irrelevance of most of any library's collection to humanistic scholarship. In spite of the "new historicism" and the increased awareness among humanistic scholars of the importance of context, much scholarship sidesteps the density of library collections in favor of more accessible alternatives—density is often an obstacle rather than an invitation. The very size of collections, the availability of too much "information"—the white noise of scholarship—encourages in many a retreat into more manageable, more familiar realms. Then, too, there is the fact that unlike museums and archaeological sites,

libraries are repositories of "multiples"; their claims on society lack the urgency and pointedness of those institutions whose domain is the unique, the culturally privileged.

An additional reason on the campus of an major university may well be the cultural gulf that exists between two overspecialized communities which often coexist as if they were separate tribes—the faculty and the librarians. This is no small gulf—and it seems only to grow wider. When bibliographers replaced faculty as book selectors, library collections may have improved substantially by certain criteria, but faculty knowledge of, interest in, and participation in libraries diminished correspondingly. University libraries have become appendages of university administrations, and their principal working relationships—at least at the top—are with the cadre of managers and planners who set priorities and allocate resources. Thus, although Dr. Fabian's proposal that humanities scholars take as their first duty curatorial responsibility for the objects of culture is enormously appealing, it also challenges the very organization of academic life today. Perhaps that is a good thing: librarians and faculty do have a large stake in a common future.

It seems to me that for libraries to take seriously Dr. Fabian's project—and they should, we would all agree—their agendas should embrace two broad goals:

(1) Libraries need to spend more attention on presenting themselves and their collections to as wide a public as possible. In this, they can take a leaf from the notebook of museums, which have been enormously successful in this century in presenting themselves and their collections as possessing self-evident authority—just the kind of unquestioned authority imbedded in Fabian's notion of culture. Although there are surely many and complex reasons for the cutural—and hence economic—success of museums, it should be noted that this success has *not* involved any real redefinition of canon. The success of our museums has been built out of their "treasures," a self-referencing notion that exploits the parochialism of "cultures."

Libraries have been slow to grasp the message here, and yet there is no reason why libraries could not exploit their own treasures in different ways, all of which would make them appear intrinsic and essential to the culture that is ours—in the singular or the plural. For libraries to occupy a more prominent place in the view of society, they themselves must make more of an effort to reconnect themselves to society—and in new ways. The New York Public Library has been successful in this regard, and its success in self-presentation has momentarily opened doors to a wider constituency for us all. But this is a moment that will need to be seized if libraries are to have a significant future as humanistic institutions.

(2) The most pressing task which Dr. Fabian sets for the humanities is that of reordering and reorganizing culture—creating a new architecture of culture that could inform a new archaeology of the past. This is the other side of the coin from the *presentation* of the *culturally self-evident:* it demands the creation of *new* hierarchies of culture. A new present requires a new past, and in the work of identifying this new past, librarians and humanists should form an ideal partnership. In place of neoconservative great books (all of which have been reprinted many, many times over and thus are essentially antithetical to rudition), the learning of scholars and librarians would be bent to serve the identification or invention of new cultural traditions more appropriate to the pluralism of the present.

L. P. Hartley's novel *The Go-Between* begins: "The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there." I often hear this sentence in my mind as I wander about in our library stacks: our collections *are* largely foreign countries, congeries of exotica, and to find meaning, value, and cultural relevance in them requires that generosity of intelligence to which Dr. Fabian alludes. In other words, our collections are probably as apt for enthnographic fieldwork as any geographically remote community of people. And in the process of rediscovery and reinterpretation, libraries as institutions could be repositioned to occupy more prominent places in society as a whole.

Although I feel strongly that librarians should not themselves participate in canon construction or deconstruction, I believe they can make available a wealth of materials—including new sources—capable of fostering a richer view of the past and present. Dr. Fabian's notion of culture is, of course, the ultimate trump card, indeed the only card which the humanities have to play against the engineers and technocrats, for his notion is capable of incorporating and integrating in it all human activity. It seems to me that Dr. Fabian is absolutely right in his insistence that we need to substitute ethnological interpretation for antiquarian grubbing and the cultural autism the latter implies.

Having said this much, I am not quite sure how to bring it all off. I'm not even sure that in a fundamentally ahistorical culture such as ours it can be brought off. Perhaps from the perspective of the Continent, where historicism has always been more integral to the notion of culture, there is reason to be more optimistic. Nonetheless, I don't want to end in a minor key, so let me conclude my comment by pointing to things that seem to portend a future for the humanities closer to what Dr. Fabian has proposed, as well as a monitum.

First, the marriage of anthropology and the humanities appears to have occurred already, with each partner contributing something, each taking something from the relationship. Contrary to what we may read in the *New York Times*, this is not a development peculiar to Princeton University—it pervades both Europe and America and is as evident in Cambridge and Berlin as it is in Boston and Berkeley. It can even be glimpsed in staid Palo Alto, where the current crop of fellows at the Stanford Humanities Center includes four anthropologists. So much for the "closing of the American mind."

Just as historians and literary scholars are increasingly adapting the vocabulary of anthropologists to the study of Western texts and traditions, so too anthropologists are more open than ever to textual and historicist approaches to peoples and cultures.

Second, the U.S. Congress itself has been receptive to the

notion of libraries as repositories of culturally significant "information." I use the word *information* intentionally. The allocation of substantial funds to the National Endowment for the Humanities for the *preservation* of library collections threatened because of deteriorating paper is a major coup for libraries, for the humanities, and for scholars in general. The extent to which NEH will feel itself able to *conserve* "multiples" is another matter, however, still in the process of being worked out. But whatever the definition, the investment is important—and not simply for the United States but for Europe as well. How will libraries build on the recognition implicit in the NEH Preservation Program? That is the question.

There are other omens of a promising future for libraries and the humanities in this country, but we must always bear in mind that libraries serve areas other than *just* the humanities. More than half of the book budget in any major American research library will go to supporting the sciences and the social sciences. These are important constituencies whose needs always have to be kept in mind. Their interests and the costs associated with them may push and pull libraries in other directions, away from the humanities. There is evidence of this happening already. Thus, if humanistic scholarship genuinely sees libraries as crucial to its research agenda, it will need to demonstrate that they are—forcefully and convincingly. Dr. Fabian and his colleagues will have to take an active role in framing the arguments. If discourse about discourse is adequate, the future of academic libraries may indeed rest more with the engineers and the administrators than with the arts and humanities faculty. At this point, that seems very much a possibility, not only in this country but on the right bank of the Seine as well. That is something for all humanists to ponder.

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Literary Scholarship

I am pleased to respond to Bernhard Fabian's challenging address: it is a provocative and stimulating discourse on the present condition of the humanities in our culture. Furthermore, it is a discussion that offers a rationale for shifting our considerations and giving a much larger context to our ideas about the place of the humanities in an age where they seem peripheral if not remote. Here Dr. Fabian speaks both to the condition of the humanities and to the prospect for their survival through the illuminating hypothesis of Karl Popper's tripartite divisions of culture. Rather than tracing in detail my reactions, however, I will respond by discussing a bit further an issue which Dr. Fabian's essay provoked as I read it. I was struck by the specific implications he raises in relation to my own discipline of literature.

Nowhere are Bernhard Fabian's concerns more apparent to me than in the field of literary scholarship, at least as it is now practiced in the United States. What with the virtual disappearance of the professional man or woman of letters—for a host of reasons beyond my considerations here—the practice of literary criticism is almost exclusively inside the academy. This situation, almost fifty years in the making, is but one starting point for analyzing the fate of the humanities. The occasional lapses into pedantry and frequently self-serving ritual of literary criticism illustrate the withdrawal of cultural phenomena from center stage. It would be simplistic and therefore rash to make any general claim about the condi-

tions of the humanities without a great deal of evidence, but my role here is to chart briefly a response to the larger picture.

The problems and conflicts within the discipline of literature have very deep social and intellectual roots that among other things manifest themselves in debates over the concept of texts, the aesthetic, perceptual, and ideological arguments related to discourse, the validity of canonization, and the nature of language itself. Indeed, these are important subjects, and each of them has implications for how the humanities are related to the contemporary culture. The point is, these questions are related to the social and intellectual conditions of our time. The recent response to the discovery of Paul de Man's wartime anti-Semitic writings revealed a kind of collective paradigm of the cultural isolation that our speaker addressed.

Not too many years ago, American critics such as Edmund Wilson and Lionel Trilling were deeply engaged in the exploration of literature in its broad cultural context—a context that assumed a wide and somewhat diverse audience. Both wrestled extensively, and some would say endlessly, with issues that, as Fabian points out, are absent in much of literary criticism and theory today. Such critics have not disappeared; Richard Poirier, Robert Alter, and Susan Sontag, to name a few, continue to engage a wider intellectual community. For these critics literature assumes not so much a privileged position but an imaginative source where an analysis of the culture begins. Clearly it is important, and indeed a matter of survival, for the humanities to assume a more central and more important role in the culture, and to do so the individual disciplines must engage the larger moral, ethical, and social questions that society confronts. This is not to suggest a narrow special pleading, but, put simply, to require that our disciplines ask the questions and engage the complexities we face as a civilization. Bernhard Fabian not only points to a restoration of the place of the humanities in the culture but also suggests a forceful new dynamic.

In Popper's ontology his "cultural world," whether opposed or complimentary to the scientific world, is one firm

leg in the tripod of civilization. As Fabian makes clear, in that cultural world institutions such as libraries assume a position of enormous responsibility—a responsibility whose implication can hardly be imagined given the library's peripheral position in our culture today.

Whether or not we agree with Popper's ontology, Bernhard Fabian's presentation provocatively raises the important problems that we in the humanities confront.

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